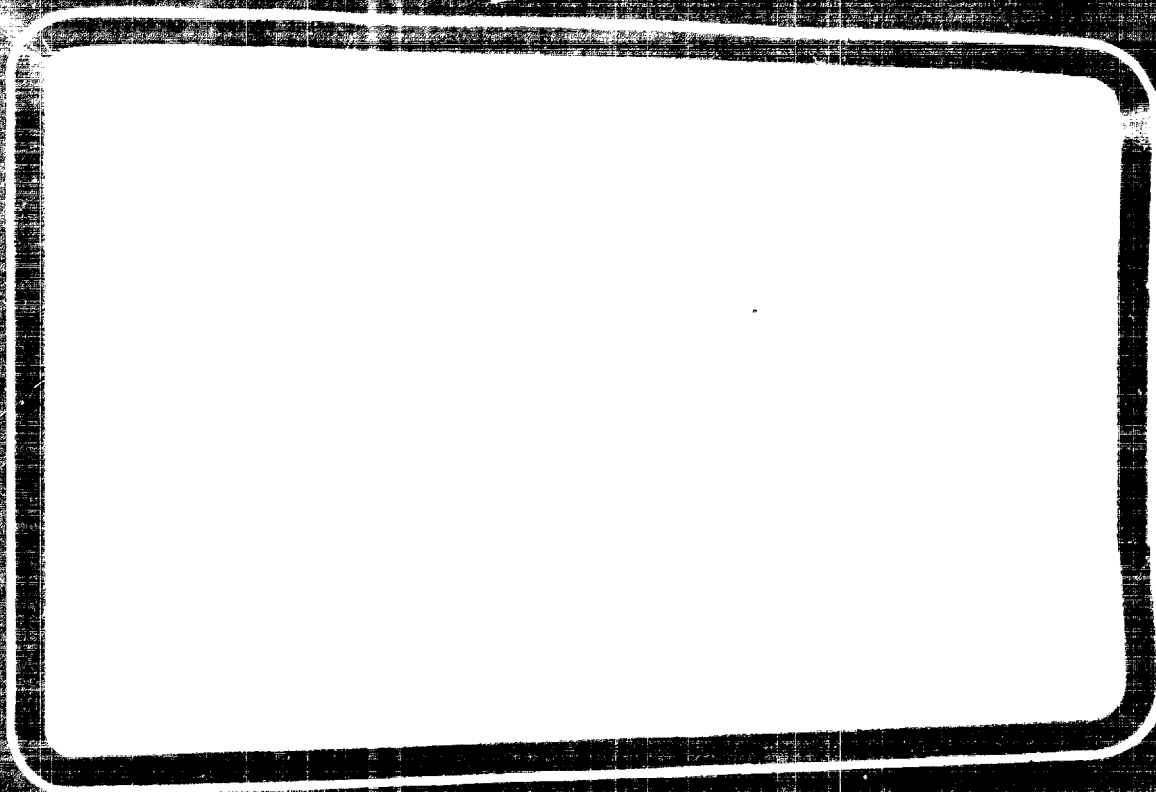


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Member of Delegation of the Pakistan Medical Association to the USSR

Professor of Tuberculosis, K.F. Medical College, Lahore

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CPYRGHT

Behind the "Iron Curtain"

AN AMBITION FULFILLED

I have travelled widely and seen many countries, but it had always been my great ambition to visit Russia, because it was said to be so inaccessible, and one heard almost diametrically opposite views about that country behind the "Iron Curtain." I was thrilled when such an opportunity came my way, and it was all the more welcome because I was to be a guest of the Soviet Union which ensured that I would have all facilities and opportunities to see Russian life from close quarters.

Shortly before leaving I happened to meet a foreigner who told me in confidence that when I saw the large and modern hospitals of the USSR and other modern amenities of life in that country I shall forget the U. S. A., Great Britain, France and other places which might have previously impressed me. This naturally stirred in me an even greater desire to see the USSR. Not the least was also the consciousness of the fact that I would join the select band of the privileged few who had been in and out of the USSR.

The Pakistan Medical Association at its annual Conference held in March 1950 invited delegates from many foreign countries, among whom had been a delegation from the USSR, consisting of three doctors under the leadership of Dr. Karakolov, the Health Minister of the Kazakistan Republic. After the Conference this delegation had visited a few towns of East and West Pakistan and it was in reciprocation of this visit that the Soviet Government extended an invitation to the Pakistan

Medical Association to send a delegation of 12 doctors to visit their country.

THE ROAD TO KABUL

The journey from Lahore to Peshawar by train was comfortable as usual, but when we crossed into the Afghan territory it was a different story. We were a party of fourteen, 12 doctors including one lady doctor and two non medical wives of doctors. As the day was Sunday and only licensed Afghan vehicles could ply on Kabul road, a most uncomfortable bus fell to our lot and on the top of it the condition of the road was appalling. Every few miles we begged the driver to stop the bus near a way side "qahwakhana" (tea shop). We got out of the bus and stretched out flat on the "charpais" of the "qahwakhana" to give some rest to our aching bones.

We had started at eight in the morning and after much shaking and jolting we just managed to reach Jalalabad by the evening. The Pakistan Consul at Jalalabad, whom we had informed by telephone from a wayside police post, was waiting for us on the outskirts of the town. He was extremely kind and helpful, and provided us with hot baths, a sumptuous meal and beddings. In the morning we woke up fresh enough to face the bus and the road for another day.

Delegates in front of Opera House, Tashkent (Uzbekistan)



Most of the land alongside the road from Jalalabad to Kabul was barren and uninviting. There was hardly any traffic on this road and one could not help wondering at the plight

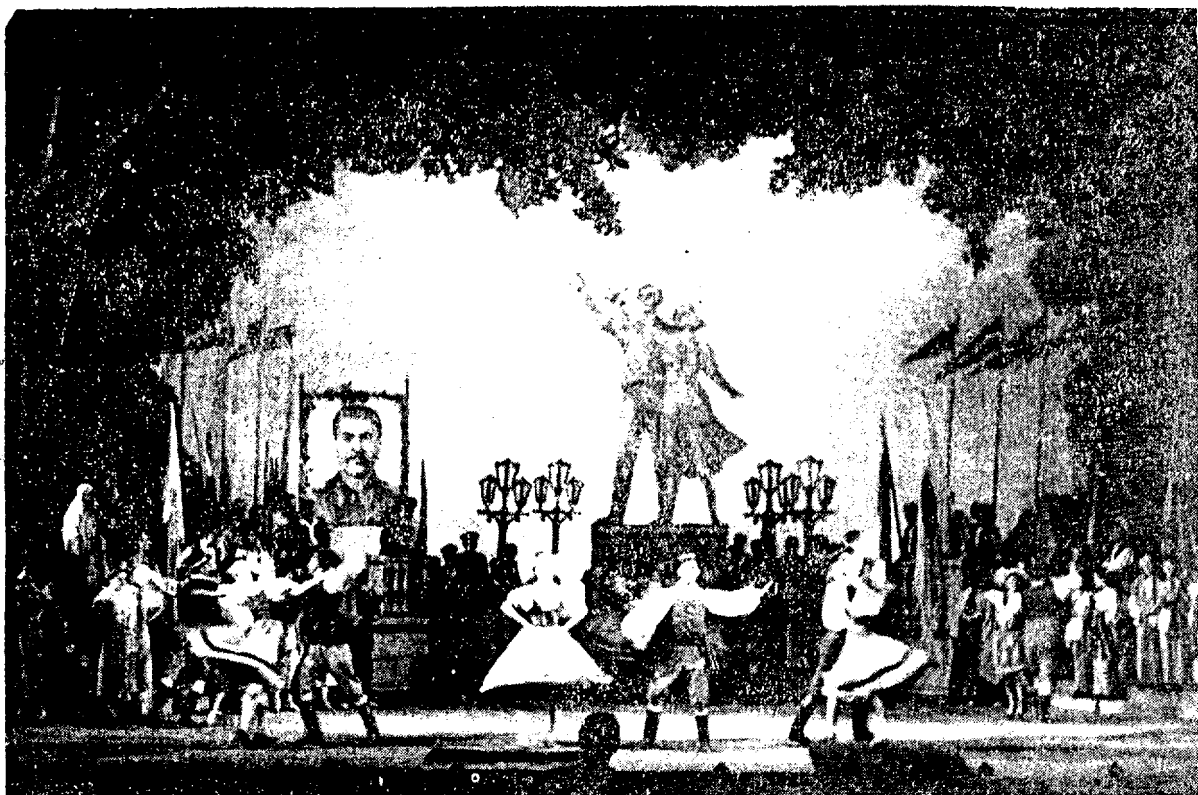
of the main supply route of petrol and other commodities for Afghanistan. In the afternoon we reached Kabul. Officers of the Pakistan Embassy welcomed us and put us up in the clean and comfortable rest rooms of the Embassy. They spared no pains in entertaining and feeding us during the two days that we stopped there.

Except for the Kabul River that flows through the town, the rest of Kabul with its dusty roads looked like a somewhat bigger model of Dera Ghazi Khan. On the second evening we were entertained to a sumptuous dinner by the USSR Ambassador. Early next morning we went to the small Kabul aerodrome.



Opera House at Tashkent showing Uzbek architecture.

A two-engined Russian plane of the size of a dakota, which was on its routine weekly visit to Kabul, was waiting for us. One did feel somewhat nervous to cross the Hindukush at 20,000 ft. in a modest looking aeroplane with no seat belts either. We did the crossing of the snow-covered peaks of the Hindukush with oxygen masks stuck to our faces.



Russian Folk Dance, Opera House, Tashkent.

ON THE RUSSIAN SOIL

After a short flight we landed at Tarmez, the first Russian port across the mountains, on the 21st May, 1952. It was a small air port with very few signs of traffic. The area round about this port was mostly desolate and no village or town was in sight. Dark smoke was rising at one point which came nearer and nearer and turned out to be an old fashioned railway engine with a long snout pulling a few goods wagons along a railway track.

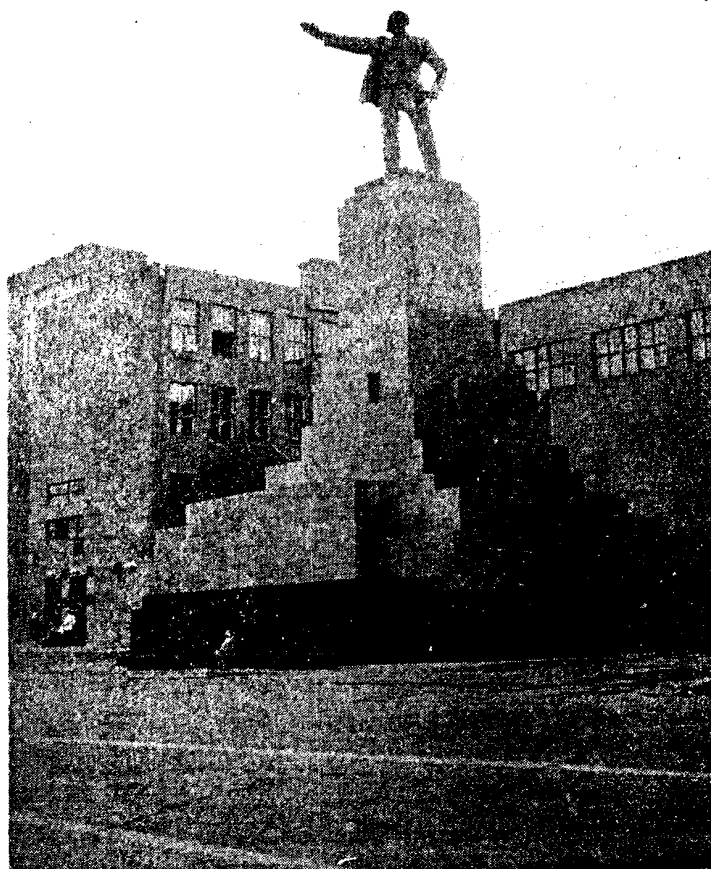
At Tarmez a thorough search was made of our baggage so much so that some papers belonging to the leader of the delegation, and the photographs that I was carrying as a gift to the photographers of the USSR, and also our cameras, were taken away to another room for scrutiny. Everything, however, was returned, but the checking took two hours. There being no lavatory in the main building of the airport we were shown a small shack with an earthen "convenience" about fifty yards away. It had not been cleaned for months.

WELCOME AT TASHKENT

After three hours' flight we reached Tashkent, Capital of the Uzbekistan Republic, where we were scheduled to break the journey for the night. Here a pleasant surprise awaited us. Uzbek girls with bouquets of flowers and some elite of the town were present to offer us welcome. Their greeting was indeed warm and picturesque. When introductions and other formalities were over we walked towards the exit which was flanked by statues of Lenin and Stalin, and through rooms decorated with their portraits out to the waiting cars where another huge statue of Lenin was facing the city.

We drove through the streets of the modern parts of Tashkent and were taken to the Tashkent Hotel. It was quite modern except that the sanitary conveniences were too few and full of flies. We were lavishly entertained. As one of us had become air-sick on the way we could not leave for Moscow the next morning. Therefore we asked for a halt in Tashkent for a day. As a longer halt in Tashkent was not in the programme our hosts hesitantly agreed after several consultations amongst themselves and we gathered also with Moscow.

In the evening we were taken to the Tashkent Opera. It is a grand building recently built in Uzbek style and the show



Lenin in front of an office building, Tashkent
(Uzbekistan).

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was superb. Uzbeks are a beautiful race and about half of the performers being Uzbeks the show had an added charm for us. Not knowing the language we could not follow the theme except that it culminated in a large and highly decorated picture of Stalin which was brought to the stage amidst great rejoicing, shouting and dancing.

During the interval and at the end of the show the audience

In the Stalin Square, Tashkent (Uzbekistan)



were anxious to see us and to talk to us. Their warmth and friendship was obvious. Many of them were seeing a Pakistani for the first time in their lives. After the show people in the auditorium blocked our way for quite a long time in spite of the efforts of our interpreter to clear a passage for us.

Next morning we were taken for sight-seeing. It was a pity that the interpreter could not see his way to take us to the old parts of the town. In the modern quarter, kacha roads are being replaced by wide paved avenues. The magnificent opera house, a picture house, a theatre, several schools and colleges and other public buildings as well as residential quarters and

government stores have been built there. A large and beautiful public park adorns new Tashkent.

Young Uzbeks looked healthy and cheerful. In the crowds one could see elder people still in their old fashioned clothes and not so robust looking as the younger folk. Here and there a woman with a veil hanging in front of her head could also be spotted. We were told that many such women still live in old Tashkent which modernization has not touched. We learnt that one mosque still exists in the old town which is open for prayers on Fridays only; but in spite of our repeated requests we could not see it. Ali Sher Navoi, the famous author of "Shirin Farhad", is the only Uzbek hero whose statue adorns the modern Tashkent.

THE NEW RELIGION

It was still too early in our tour to form any considered opinion about the state of religion in the USSR. One evening some of us had an opportunity to talk to two young Uzbeks who knew a few words of Persian. From them we

Ali Sher Navoi, author of "Shirin Farhad," Tashkent (Uzbekistan).





Tashkent University Building.

gathered that their parents had studied the Quran and offered Namaz but the young men had neither had an opportunity to learn the Quran nor did they feel any need for doing so. They had been taught that religion as such, from the national point of view, was a superfluous thing, and that Marxism which they were taught in schools and colleges was sufficient to provide them with their spiritual necessities of life. Much information on this subject could not be gathered because firstly there was the difficulty of language and secondly there was obvious hesitation on the part of the people to talk to us.

One Uzbek girl, a little bolder than the rest, who could speak some Persian, got quite friendly with some of us. On being questioned if she was a Muslim she smiled and replied, "*Man Dukhtar-i-Uzbek Hastam*" (I am an Uzbek's daughter). After the embarrassing question and her clever reply she vanished in the crowd not to be seen again.

Upon these observations my first reaction was that I was witnessing a great turn in the spiritual history of mankind. The era of the great theistic religions was coming to an end and here we were on the threshold of a new era of godlessness. But soon I was seeing Lenins and Stalins by the hundred propped up on pedestals everywhere with offerings of flowers from their devotees lying at their feet. Religion may have been abolished in Russia, but a new religion has taken its place with Lenin and Stalin as its prophets. The same faith, devotion and even rituals were there.

Another feature that we noted in Tashkent was that the better dressed men, women and children were usually Western Russians. Although there were a number of Uzbeks in responsible posts, the Russians seemed to preponderate over them by a wide margin.

In the morning we visited the Medical College and hospital. It was quite an up-to-date institution consisting of several blocks

**The Medical Delegation with the Staff of the Medical Institute,
Tashkent (Uzbekistan)**





In the grounds of the Medical Institute, Tashkent (Uzbekistan).

of old and new buildings extending over a wide area. We learnt that the hospital has 2,000 beds, 200 doctors and teachers and 500 nurses. Sixty per cent of students and majority of staff are Western Russians. The teaching is done in Russian, but for the Uzbek students who do not understand Russian, lectures are delivered in the Uzbek language while they are learning the Russian language. Seventy per cent of the staff and students are women.

In the afternoon we were taken to see the large textile mill of Tashkent with 204,000 spindles and 20,000 workers. Most of the workers we saw in the factory at that time were women. For the benefit of the workers there was a polyclinic which was well equipped and well staffed with doctors and nurses. We were told that a four-hundred-bed hospital was also attached to this factory.

We expressed a keen desire to see the house of a factory worker. As a result we were taken to an apartment house close by and shown the set of rooms occupied by a senior factory worker

on the fifth floor of the building. The accommodation was ample for a family of four people with a bed-room, dining-room and a small kitchen. Information about our visit had been sent beforehand and as all other doors of the large apartment house were locked this was the only set of rooms we were able to see. It may also be mentioned that throughout our tour this was the only private dwelling that we saw. We were not able to see the private lodgings of doctors and nurses or other workers, although we were naturally anxious to do so, nor did we have the pleasure of being asked to tea or a meal by any doctor or other Russian citizen.

ON TO MOSCOW

On the 23rd May, we proceeded on from Tashkent to Moscow by a plane with three halts on the way. These airports were similar to the one at Tarmez, with few signs of traffic and the sanitary conveniences were of the same pattern. The journey from Tashkent to Moscow took about 11 hours.

Moscow Airport, with its newly constructed buildings, presented a more impressive sight than the ports we had seen on the way, but it lacked the bustle of international airports such as Northholt of London, LaGuardia of New York, or even Drig Road of Karachi. A number of two-engined

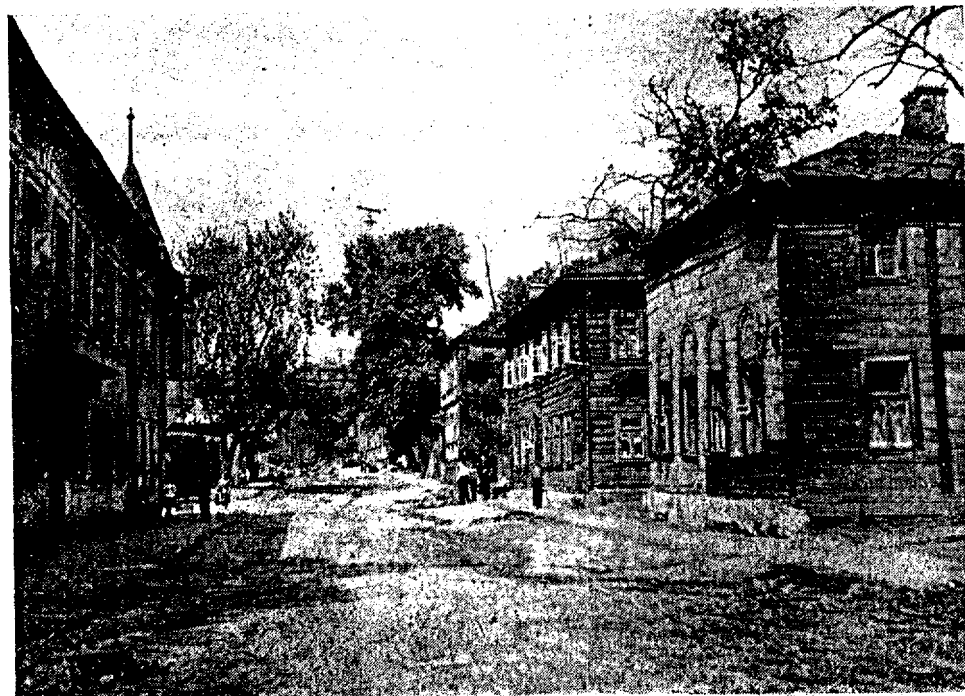
Ministerial Building in Smolensk Square, Moscow.



planes were on the tarmac, but no four-engined plane was seen anywhere in the USSR.

At the airport of Moscow we were received by the Deputy Minister of Health who was a lady, some other doctors including our friend Dr. Putrov who was here in the Karachi Conference last year, and representatives of VOKS. We drove to the city twenty-four miles away and were put up in the Metropole Hotel, third floor of which we learnt was reserved for foreigners. The hotel dates back to the Czarist times and consists of a magnificent building lavishly and comfortably furnished. On the second floor a table for about sixteen persons was laid in a small room for our exclusive use. Two Russian women interpreters who spoke fair and fluent English were attached to us and from this point on they were our constant companions throughout our travels in the USSR. They acted as our hosts, guides as well as interpreters.

Off the main avenues of Moscow.



CPYRGHT



Moscow State University at Lenin Hills, Moscow.

The daily programme usually consisted of breakfast at nine; visit to hospitals, etc., at ten; return to hotel at about three or four to have dinner which was the big meal of the day; rest in the afternoon; opera, ballet, pictures or puppet show in the evening; supper on return from show at mid-night and then to bed. After supper the two interpreters would say good-bye to go home, but later on we discovered that both of them were putting up in the same hotel and on the same floor.

Two or three days after our arrival in Moscow some of us felt bold enough to go out for a walk at night. As we alighted from the cars after seeing a show we set out for the walk and it so happened that the interpreters did not notice us. When the rest sat for supper some chairs were found vacant. Noticing this one of the interpreters left the dining room and did not come back until we



At the V. I. Lenin Mausoleum in Red Square, Moscow.

had returned from our walk. This fact and later observations gave us the feeling that although we were free to roam about, we were not unwatched.

STANDARD OF LIVING

The central part of Moscow is very impressive with its broad streets, wide squares and sturdy buildings six or seven stories high. The buildings on Gorki Street, the Moscow Hotel, two big Ministerial Buildings and the University are some of the impressive additions of the Communist Regime. Moscow, however, lacks the glamour, the life, the display of wealth and

comforts, the soda fountains, the eating places, the petrol and service stations, the numerous stores overflowing with beautiful articles which brighten other capitals.

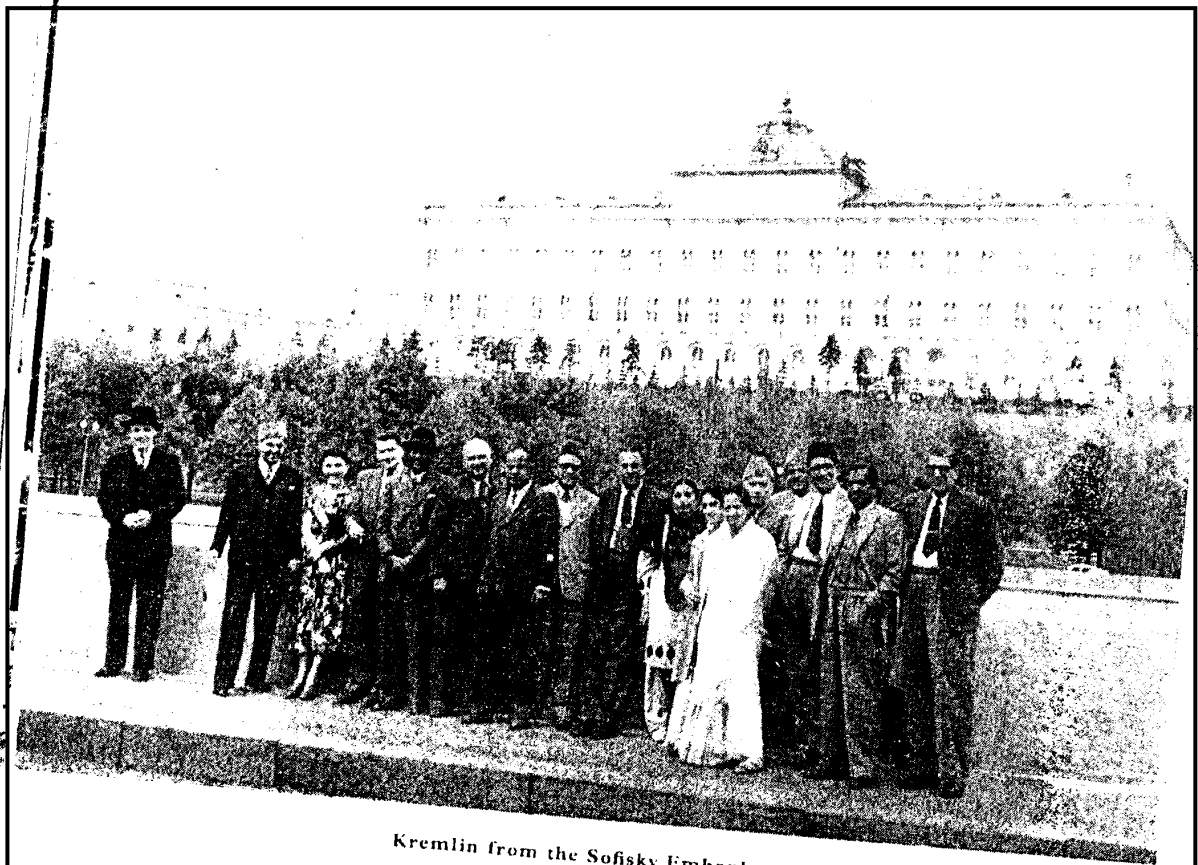
The people mostly wear utility clothes, are not as hilarious as one sees in Western cities and the women are mostly without cosmetics and appear as sober in temperament as in dress. The number of cars on the roads is much too small as compared with other capitals although the bus service is quite frequent. The opportunity for window shopping is not too good as all stores belong to the Government and therefore lack the genius of individual enterprise as one sees in large cities of the western world.

The food shops remain open till late in the night and their windows are decorated with clay models of bread, bacon, eggs, etc. Queues in front of food shops was a regular feature throughout the day. There is daily rationing of bread. There are six large department stores in Moscow owned, of course, by the Government and these are stocked mostly with utilitarian goods.

The prices fixed by the Government seemed extremely high. For example a pair of shoes of medium quality costs Rs. 400/-, a pair of shoe laces costs Rs. 2/- and an average woollen suit Rs. 3,000/-. A *papier-mache* box about nine inches long which here would cost about twenty or thirty rupees costs there Rs. 250/-. Mutton is sold at Rs. 12/- per seer, milk at Rs. 6/- per seer, printed cotton cloth at

Carrying the wreath to the V. I. Lenin Mausoleum in Red Square, Moscow.





Kremlin from the Sofisky Embankment, Moscow.

Rs. 12/- per yard and tafeta at Rs. 125/- per yard. A one-pound box of chocolates costs Rs. 50/-, a packet of 20 cigarettes Rs. 6.8 and a neck-tie Rs. 75/-. Five of my friends had an average dinner at an average restaurant in Moscow and it cost them Rs. 225/- without drinks. A box of matches costs 5 annas. The same imported into Pakistan costs here half anna.

We were told that the minimum wage in the USSR is 300 rubles, i.e., Rs. 270/- per month. One ruble is equal to Re. -14/6. The average daily cost of food per patient in Votkin Hospital, Moscow, was given to us as 42 rubles. For 300 rubles it must be very hard for a labourer to make his two ends meet. A Pakistani unskilled labourer gets Rs. 60/- per month, that is one-fifth of the minimum

Russian wage, but the prices in Russia are usually ten times more than those prevailing in Pakistan.

Of course one has to take into account also such facilities as free education up to the 7th standard, a small old age pension, maternity benefits and partially free medical aid. Even so, the cost of living in the USSR is so terribly high and rigors of climate are so acute that all adult members of a family must work hard in order to maintain themselves at bare subsistence level.

Maximum wages are high and quite out of proportion to minimum wages. Coal miners, engineers, etc., are paid many thousand rubles per month showing a great economic disparity in the reward for labour.

We had no means of knowing whether free education upto the

The Moscow Mosque.



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seventh standard had resulted in universal literacy. There were very few newspaper and magazine stalls, and newspaper boys on street corners shouting to sell daily papers—a sight so familiar in Western countries—were conspicuously absent. People walking on the pavements or travelling by buses and "metro" were seldom seen with newspapers. But lack of interest in newspapers and low standard of life can be compatible with literacy.

Another interesting fact that we noted in the USSR was the absence of dogs and bicycles. I do not remember to have seen a single dog, pet or otherwise, except in Pavlov's Institute in Leningrad, where a few are kept for research purposes. Similarly, bicycles are a very rare sight and we did not see a single sale or repair shop for bicycles in the USSR.

LENIN

One afternoon we were taken to lay a wreath on the mausoleum of Lenin. Four times a week large crowds queue up four deep

Friday Congregation in Moscow Mosque.



CPYRGHT



The Author at the Moscow Tuberculosis Institute of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the U.S.S.R. talking to Dr. Z. A. Lebedieva, Director of the Institute.

and quarter of a mile long to pay homage to their leader Lenin. The mausoleum is simple in design and is built with red granite on one side of the Red Square under the walls of the Kremlin. The queue was broken for our sake and we were taken straight up to the entrance of the mausoleum where we placed the wreath on the altar near the entrance. Several other wreaths and flowers were already lying there.

Turning to the left we went down a flight of steps into a cool chamber lined with highly polished black marble wherein lay the body of Lenin wrapped in his uniform with hands and face exposed, looking as fresh as Madam Tassaud's wax models. It was a great sight to see the body of Lenin in such a high state of preservation even after twenty-eight years of his death. The crowds swept slowly by the serene and handsome figure lying

in state and separated from it only by the sealed glass covering and the three soldiers on the three sides. The way out led to a path along the wall of the Kremlin where there are several graves and statues of leaders who gave their lives during and after the Revolution.

THE KREMLIN

One morning our interpreters told us that we were going to the Kremlin for a visit. There was great excitement among us because this name has come to have a certain amount of awe and mystery about it. The Kremlin actually is an ancient fortress situated on a somewhat high ground and contains Czar's palace and churches. A large secretariate building has been added more recently. There are two main gates to it, one opening on the Red Square and the other on one side. We were taken in through this side entrance. Both the entrances are closely guarded by armed militia men and there is a system of bells ringing and green and red lights changing as cars approach for entry or exit. The churches are in a good state of repairs and are being used as museums. Uniforms, utensils, ornaments and other paraphernalia belonging to the Czars are preserved and exhibited in the palace. The palace is unimposing from the outside, but the inside is magnificently decorated with golden chandeliers, oil masterpieces and marble linings.

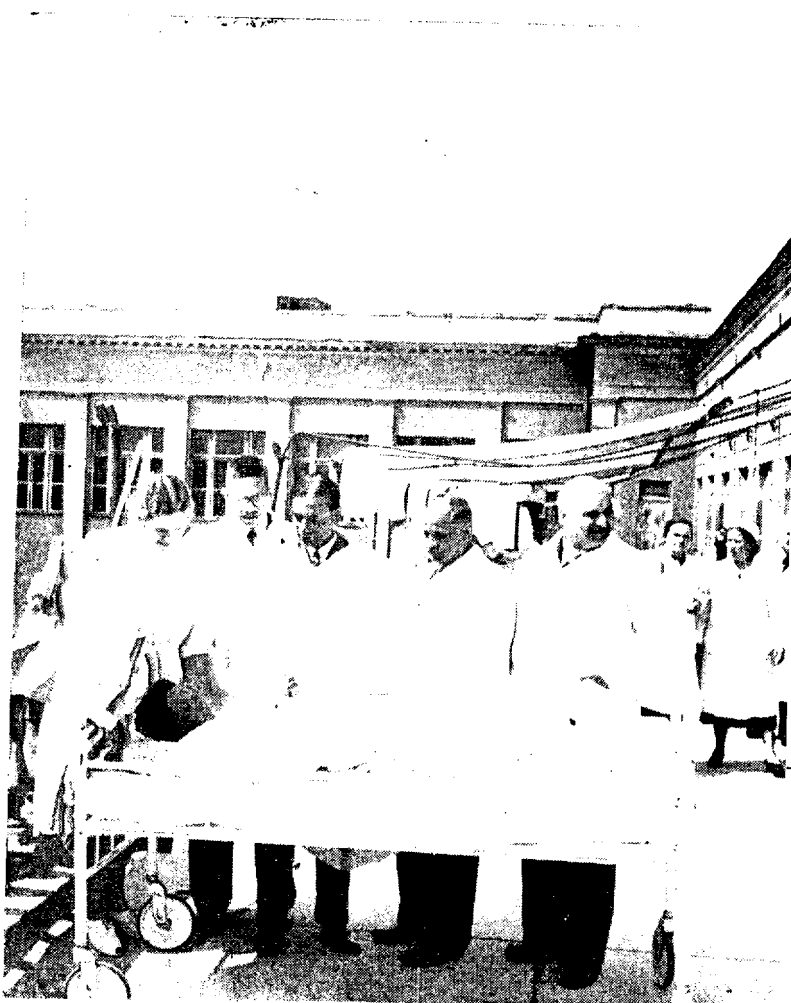
One evening we were taken to the office of VOKS, the USSR Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and shown a film called "The Fall of Berlin". The parts of Stalin, Roosevelt, Churchill and Hitler were played by persons who resembled them very much except for Churchill who had more stoop and a more pointed nose than normal. In the play the advice and predictions of Stalin proved supreme and the Russians conquered Berlin against heavy odds when their Allies were no where near to assist them. Hitler was shown as a completely mad and demoralized man, and Churchill was ridiculed when he proposed a toast for His Majesty the King. (I learnt that this film was shown at the USSR Embassy at Karachi the other evening but

the part where Churchill proposes a toast to the King had been deleted).

CROWDS LIKE IT

In the three operas, one puppet show, and one circus that we saw, the two outstanding and common features were the triumph of "workers" over "capitalists" and mockery of the Americans. In one scene, a rickety car was shown which was falling to pieces at every step and a ridiculously dressed long-necked American wearing large spectacles and with all sorts of gadgets around him was the owner and driver of this car. The whole thing looked so ridiculous that during interval when we came out for fresh air I could not help remarking to Dr. Putrov, who by the way had been to the U. S. A. and had accompanied us to this show, "You Russians are making good all-round progress and I am sure you could maintain the same progress without ridiculing and humiliating other nations. To ridicule an American for his looks, dress or gadgets may be funny, but to ridicule American cars looked rather absurd when the Russian Ambassadors in Karachi and Kabul preferred to use American cars instead of their own. Moreover, it did not seem to be quite in line with your 'peace movement'." His reply was that this is done because the crowds

A T.B. patient on the sun porch of the Tuberculosis Institute, Moscow.



like it. He was right. The crowds did applaud vehemently such ridiculous scenes which were in keeping with the cartoons displayed on large boards fixed permanently in public parks such as Gorky Park of Moscow, in which the so-called capitalist countries, specially the U. S. A., Great Britain and Turkey are thoroughly ridiculed.

The Bolshoi Theatre, which was quite close to our hotel, is a modest looking building, but the inside is magnificently decorated with gold from top to bottom consisting of six tiers of seats. There is a large stage with a pit which can seat over two hundred pieces of orchestra. Two balconies on either side of the stage are reserved for foreign delegations. One evening sitting next to us was a delegation from Indo-China and on another evening there was an Iranian delegation. The hall was full to capacity on each occasion and the crowd consisted mainly of

In the Therapeutic Clinic of the First Moscow Medical Institute.





At St. Basil's Church in Red Square, Moscow.

drab-looking people with a sprinkling of well-dressed military officers many with clean-shaven heads. The operas were undoubtedly of a very high order. Repeated encores after every drop were common and in fact were so monotonous that one wondered whether the plays were highly appreciated or that the people had so few occasions to see such plays that they wanted to get as much mirth as possible out of them.

THE MOSCOW MOSQUE

On Friday we asked the interpreters to arrange for our prayer at the Moscow Mosque. Driving through the main avenues and then through badly paved alleys we reached a very poor section of the city with crumbling houses and shacks and uneven muddy streets where the mosque was situated. The mosque itself is



At the Monument of A. S. Pushkin
on Pushkin Square, Moscow.

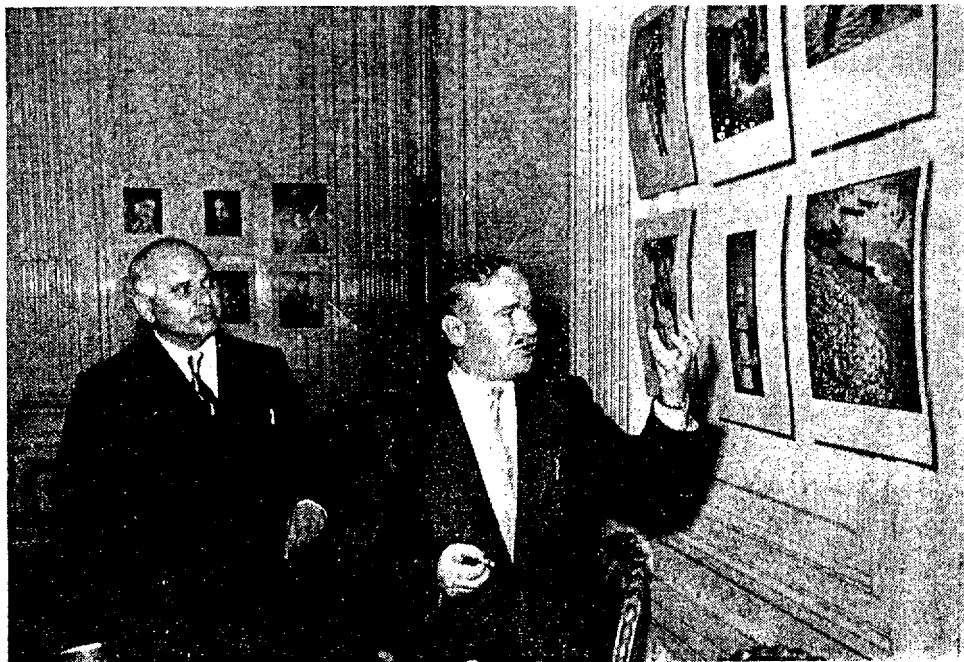
being kept in good repairs. It can accommodate about one thousand men and women. The women occupy the balcony. The mosque was full to capacity on that Friday. It seemed that they had come to know that some Pakistanis were attending the prayers. Although *Khutba* was going on when we reached, on our arrival there was stir in the hall and a way was cleared for us down the centre, lined by men standing on either side, many with reverently folded hands, or shaking and kissing our hands, and loudly greeting us with the Islamic greeting of *Assalam-o Alaikum*. The crowd did not look Russian

at all. Later we learnt that they were Tartars. Most of them were old, and looked poor in their shabby dresses. An impressive looking personage in Arabian robes was reciting the *Khutba* and he later led the prayer. It was very hot and steamy inside because most of the windows were shut. When the prayer was over, again a central passage was cleared to enable us to walk out first. Three ladies in our party who had joined the women in the balcony also came out and the crowd lingered on for quite a while, most of them just gazing at us and some of them trying to talk. The crowd was still hanging around when we got into the cars and, driving through the same uneven alleys, reached the well-paved main avenues of Moscow and back to our hotel.

THE UNDERGROUND SPLENDOUR

The Moscovites are rightly proud of their "Metro." The new underground stations, 36 in all, are pieces of real architectural beauty. Long and spacious halls, flanked with platforms and tracks on either side, are lavishly decorated with paintings, sculptures and various shades of marble panelling. They are exquisitely illuminated with golden chandeliers or modern bracket lights. All stations vary in their designs and decorations. One station has stainless-steel panelling instead of marble. The new trains are neat and clean. The atmosphere inside the stations is wholesome. Statues of Lenin and Stalin adorn every hall. As one admires the beauty and spaciousness of these underground palaces one cannot help wondering what made the Russians so lavish in building them when on the ground so many slums were awaiting cleaning up. The answer was partly found in the explanation given by the President of the VOKS in his closing remarks when I put this very question in the

Author presenting Pakistani photographs to Soviet photographers at VOKS, Moscow. Right V. S. Kalimashin, artist of the Magazine "Ogonyok."



Press Conference one day before we were leaving. He said that the Czars were for show and therefore had all their wares above the ground for display, whereas Communism started and thrived "underground," hence this homage to the "underground."

MEDICAL RELIEF

One day after our arrival in Moscow we met the Minister of Health of the Supreme Soviet Council, who gave us broad outlines of the curative and preventive set up in the USSR. We learnt from him that before the Revolution there were 20,000 doctors in this country. Now there were 200,000 and the annual output of doctors was about 20,000. There were only 13 colleges in Czarist regime whereas now there were 72. A high percentage of the state budget was allocated for medical relief. We were told that emphasis was laid on prevention and research rather than on cure. A network of clinics, hospitals and sanatoria was spread throughout the rural as well as the urban areas.

Soon after the Revolution there was a great scarcity of doctors in the country. A compromise solution was found in quickly producing low grade doctors called "Feldshers." They were persons who were given 3 or 4 years' training in elementary medicine after passing the 7th standard in school. The feldshers have now been replaced by properly qualified doctors in all important hospital and clinic jobs, but they are still being trained for junior jobs. If a feldsher wants to become full-fledged doctor he has to take a full six years' course.

The hospital and polyclinic services have been combined recently and the two form the basic medical unit. Admission to a hospital is through the polyclinic which also has some beds for short ailments and for investigation. The advantage of this arrangement is that the same doctors see the patients when they fall ill (in the polyclinic) and during treatment (in the hospital), if it is necessary, and after discharge (through the polyclinic).

In rural areas there are rural hospitals with 10 to 25 beds and an outdoor department. They are staffed by three specialists :—

a physician, an obstetrician-gynecologist and a dentist. These hospitals also carry out sanitary and epidemiological measures in the area.

Every village has a feldsher (an assistant doctor) and an obstetric station. There are 40,000 feldshers in the USSR. For specialized treatment in each rural district they have a district hospital and a polyclinic. How big the rural unit is I do not know. No light was thrown on this.

Such extensive arrangements for medical relief as we were told existed in the USSR must be having a salubrious effect upon the health of the nation, but how much can be anybody's guess. When I asked the Minister of Health about the expectation of life in the USSR, which is the real yardstick to assess the health of a nation with, he could not throw any light on it, and when I illustrated my question with American and British figures he jokingly replied that the expectation of life in Russia was, of course, much longer than in the U.S.A. Similarly, no light was thrown on the tuberculosis mortality rate since the Revolution. Prior to Revolution it is given as 400 per 100,000 population in their pamphlet "Health in the USSR". It seems that the Russians do not bother much about figures. For example, the doctor-population ratio in the country was given to us at Tashkent as 1 to 800. At Leningrad we were told it was 1 to 3,000. From the Health Minister's figures stated at the conference, *viz.*, 200,000 doctors for a population of 200 million, the ratio works out at 1 to 100,

CPYRGHT

~~1:1000~~

In Moscow we were shown a medical college, a large hospital, a polyclinic, the central tuberculosis institute and a tuberculosis clinic. Some members of the delegation were taken to a rural hospital 40 miles away, a maternity hospital and an eye hospital as well which I could not see for want of time. Almost all the institutions that we saw belonged to pre-Revolution days, but had been expanded and modernized after the Revolution. All of these institutions were well-equipped and staffed and provided with modern facilities for the training of students and the treatment of patients. Much of the heavier equipment in the X-ray depart-

ments, operation theatres and laboratories was imported from the U.S.A. or Great Britain, or perhaps left there after the war.

The system of educating young doctors is interesting. After the tenth standard, students join the medical colleges, girls preponderating over boys in the proportion of 3 to 2. In the first two years common basic subjects are taught. In the third year a student has to choose whether he prefers general curative side, preventive side or pediatrics. The three sections have a somewhat different curricula. In the fifth year the teaching of theory is completed. In the sixth year, which is the final year, the student has to select a speciality and receives additional training in that.

Guest House, Alma-Ata (Kazakistan).



In the first year students who show special aptitude for teaching or research are earmarked for further training in these lines after qualifying. The selection is done by a panel of professors in the meetings of the scientific society of students.

Students who show best results on passing out are given internships in the college for 3 years. Failures in the final year are extremely rare. The reasons given are that unfit students are weeded out in the first year and students are promoted not on one annual examination but on periodic and frequent check-ups. Hardly

CPYRGHT



Roasted sheep's head being presented to the Leader of Delegation by Dr. Karakolov, Minister of Health, Kazakhstan, at a reception in Alma-Ata.

one or two students fail to pass out of 300 to 600 students.

A list of vacant posts is supplied to the college by the Health Ministry before the termination of the course. The would-be doctors are given the appointments so that they might make themselves familiar with the places they are going to. One or two students who fail to pass for no good reason are appointed as feldshers.

After three years of qualifying, all doctors have to attend courses in special post-graduate institutions for 3 to 6 months. Those who show special aptitude are given another three years' training after which, if their thesis is accepted, they are given doctors' degree.

Head of the college is known as the Director. He has three Deputies incharge of teaching, research and treatment respectively.

Besides the Deputies, there are two Deans heading the curative and preventive departments. Scientific Council of the college meets weekly to discuss all problems relating to teaching, treatment and research. All professors are members of this Council. The Council forms sub-committees for special purposes such as study of teaching methods, etc. The students also have their Trade Unions, Scientific Societies, Poor Aid Societies, etc.

In Leningrad there is a college for Pediatricians. Five hundred students are admitted to this college every year and are taught anatomy, physiology, pathology and diseases relating only to the children. This is the only college of its kind in the USSR and it is now felt that it is not the best way to produce pediatricians. They must obtain full training first and then specialize in childrens' diseases.

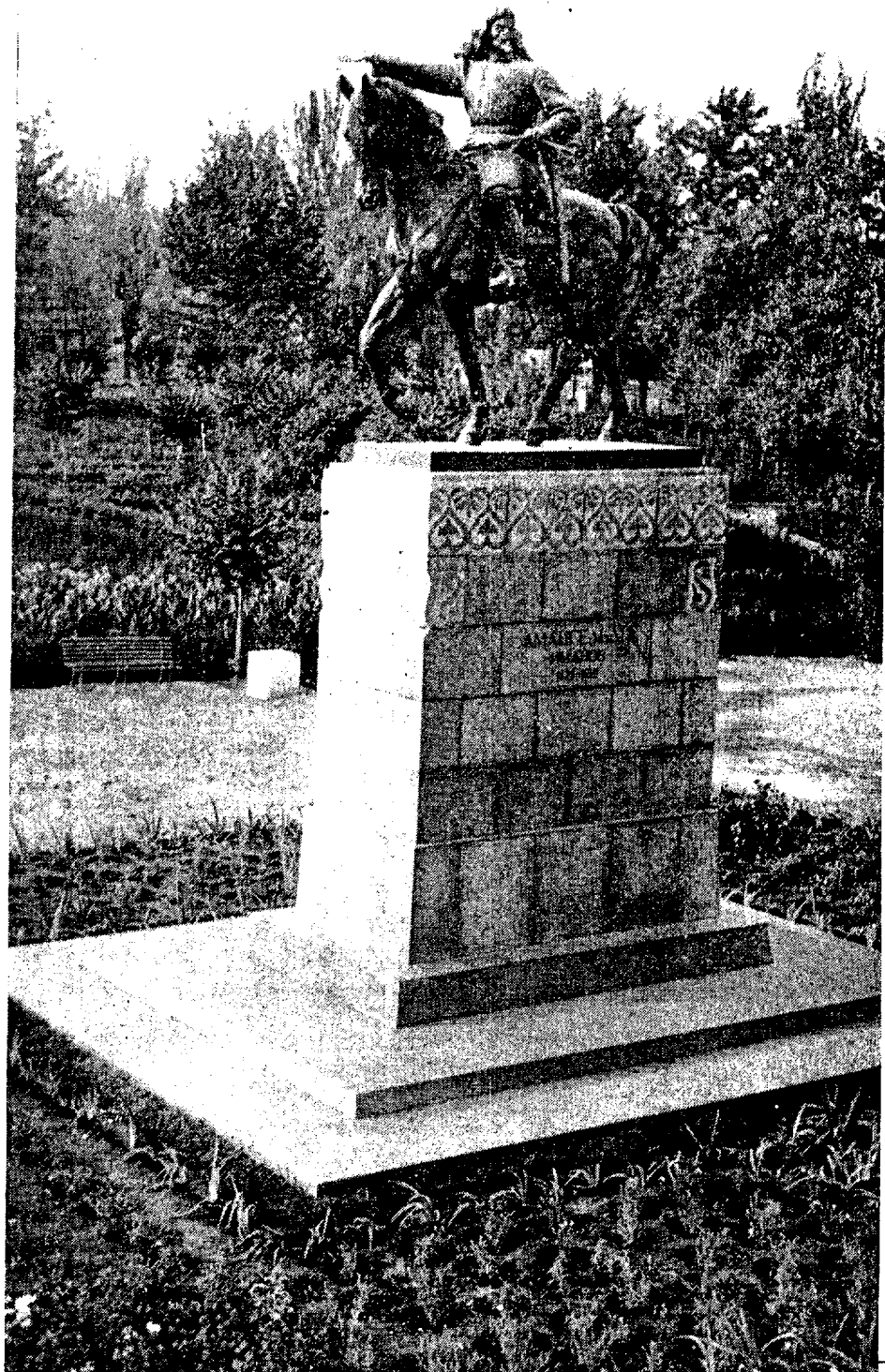
All medical aid to the patients who are admitted into the hospitals is free. The outdoor patients, however, are given prescriptions and they have to buy medicines from the Government drug stores.

Lenin and Stalin in Milk Factory, Alma-Ata.



Doctors and nurses work for six hours a day and in addition they can take part-time jobs elsewhere. Private practice is allowed to every doctor, but only the top doctors make a sizeable income from this source.

The period for training of nurses is two years, but children's nurses have to attend a three-year course. Ordinary obstetricians are trained for three years and feldsher obstetricians are trained for four years. For doctors and nurses there is no age fixed for retirement.



Statue of Amanzhol Imanov in Alma-Ata. He led the revolt against the Khan of Kazakhstan in 1916.

In some hospitals patients are provided with ear phones for listening to Moscow radio or the hospital staff lectures on medical subjects for patients.

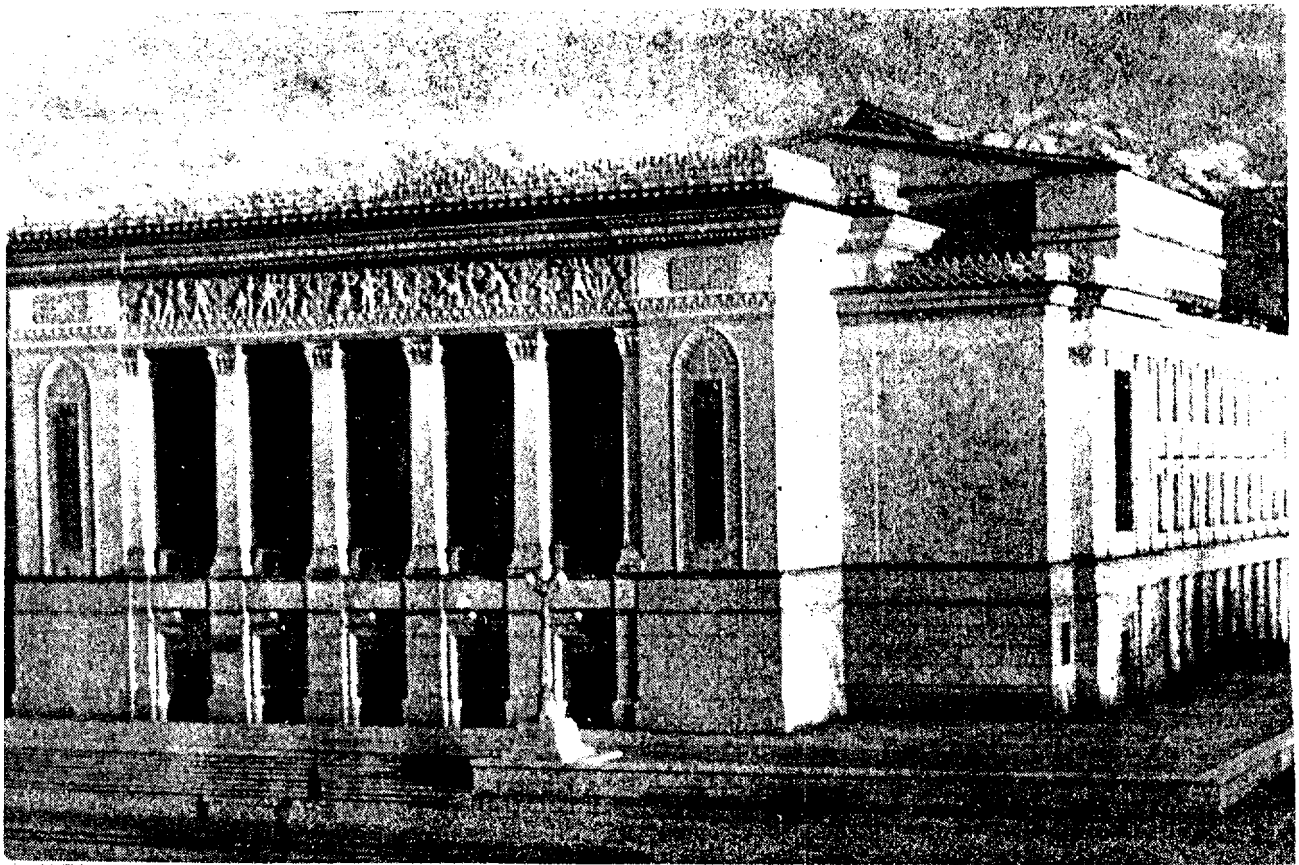
Doctors and nurses are given paid leave for 4 weeks in a year but those who are working in hazardous lines such as T. B., X-ray, etc., are given 6 weeks' leave.

Teaching of Marxism is compulsory in the first year. Statues, paintings and pictures of Lenin, Stalin and Molotov abound everywhere in the lawns, corridors, wards, laboratories and offices of all colleges and hospitals.

TEACHINGS OF PAVLOV

All medical institutions and hospitals form centres of research in addition to other functions. The teachings of Pavlov, the Russian scientist of the Czarist times, have a profound influence

Abai Theatre of Opera and Ballet, Alma-Ata (Kazakistan).



CPYRGHT

on the research in all branches of medicine and surgery in the country. A large Pavlov Institute, built at the site of residence of the late Pavlov about 20 miles from Leningrad, is devoted entirely to the research on Pavlov's theory of "conditional reflexes" which are actuated in the cortex of the brain in direct relation to the surroundings of the organism. These are not confined to the human beings only, but are found in animals, worms, insects and plants. With the help of these studies the Russian doctors claim to have achieved some success in inducing painless child birth, in relieving hyper-tension, in curing gastric ulcer, etc.

Some of the other research that is going on concerns transplantation of bones and viscera in animals. Sleep therapy, mud treatment and shower bath treatment are regular features in the Russian hospitals. Chest and abdominal surgery under purely novocain anaesthesia was demonstrated to us. It certainly had the advantage of simplicity. Intra-tracheal pressure anaesthesia that is considered essential for lung surgery in many other countries is not usually practised in Russia. Large quantities of quarter per cent novocain, besides producing the desired anaesthesia, is said to have curative value also. It is found useful in curing skin conditions like psoriasis, eczema, burns and leprosy. Performing chest and abdominal operations with ungloved hands in some hospitals was another unusual feature that we noticed.

There are no patent medicines because all drugs are manufactured in Government factories and are sold only in the Government stores. Newer drugs like Aureomycin, Terramycin and Neomycin are not available. The latest drugs for tuberculosis, Isonicotinic acid, Hydrazyde and Marsalid, which have been under research in America and elsewhere for over two years seem to be unknown. Manufacture of Streptomycin was started last year. For preventive inoculation against tuberculosis both wet and dry forms of B.C.G. vaccine are being used on a mass scale since 1944. The dry form is said to be as effective as the wet form and efforts are being made to improve it further.



On the steps of Abai Theatre of Opera and Ballet, Alma-Ata.

Birth Control in the Soviet Union is taboo and childbirth is encouraged. On the birth of the first child the parents receive a prize of 200 rubles and a monthly allowance of 40 rubles. These amounts increase with each successive child and on the birth of the tenth child the award goes up to 1500 rubles and 150 rubles per month.

TRIP TO KAZAKISTAN

After visiting various hospitals and clinics in Moscow we left for Alma-Ata, the Capital of Kazakistan. We particularly welcomed this visit because this was the second capital city of the eastern Islamic Republics of the USSR that we were visiting. The first was Tashkent, the Capital of Uzbekistan. A two-engined plane, similar to previous ones, took us to Alma-Ata with four halts on the way. The country on the way was mostly barren and sometimes for hundreds of miles no habitation or cultivation could be seen. The airports on the way had unmetalled runways as

before and the earth "toilets" as usual were at a distance to the rest rooms. We carried our meals with us in the form of cheese and caviare sandwiches, boiled eggs and lemonade. The bumpy, noisy and tiresome journey of 2,500 miles made many of us air-sick on the way.

The warmth and affection with which we were received at the air port of Alma-Ata, however, soon relieved us of the fatigue of the journey. Young girls with bouquets of flowers, the Health Minister Dr. Karakolov and many other dignitaries of the town greeted us as we alighted from the plane. After the usual greetings we were driven to a guest house in the foot of the hills outside the city. During the six-mile drive through the city to the guest house one could see paving of roads and construction of buildings going on vigorously everywhere. Much poverty could also be discerned amongst the population, but on the whole the people were healthy and handsome looking. The town and its immediate vicinity were very green and covered with pine forests, fields and gardens, in contrast to the area we traversed in the plane which all looked one vast uninhabited, uncultivated and more or less flat plateau. In the background of the city were high mountains covered with snow. Many of the Kazak children, that we passed on the way, were barefooted and scantily clad.

The guest house was situated in the midst of pine trees in the foot of the mountains. It was a fairly well-furnished and comfortable place except for the same old complaint that the bathrooms were in a detached building several yards away and the approach was through the dining-room and the kitchen.

At night we were given a formal reception in the guest house by the Minister and several other dignitaries of the town. The dinner was lavishly served and toasts as lavishly exchanged. The occasion had a peculiar oriental warmth about it and there is no doubt that Islamic traditions of the place, consciously or unconsciously, had much to do with it. During the next three days that we halted in Alma-Ata we had a pleasant and useful programme of

visits to the medical college, to the local hospitals, to a milk factory, to a candy factory and to the hills.

Alma-Ata was a small town of 17,000 inhabitants thirty years ago. The population has now swollen to about four lakhs. The old, unpaved streets and crumbling houses are being replaced

At the aerodrome in Alma-Ata. Second from left Dr. I. K. Karakolov, Minister of Public Health, Kazakhstan.



gradually by more modern structures. A Park for Culture and Rest is now under construction and there is a stadium for meetings and demonstrations of workers and for parades. Facing the stadium is a statue on horseback of Amanheld Imanov, the leader of revolt against the Khan in 1916.

Great attention is being paid in the whole of USSR to the up-bringing and education of the children. Liberal food rations are sanctioned for them and their modes of life are carefully regulated in the Government institutes provided for the purpose.

I was told that religious liberty was assured in the Constitution of the USSR, but Marxism is a compulsory subject in schools and colleges, and no other religious teaching is permitted. Although Alma-Ata has been a Muslim town for centuries, not a single mosque was in sight. Whether the Muslims have come to hate their mosques so much as to have demolished them, or they have disappeared because of the ravages of time or

Park of Culture and Rest in Alma-Ata with statue of Stalin and picture of Molotov.



politics, I cannot say. At the reception was a poet who said he was *Hafiz* of Quran in his younger days and still remembered several verses from it, but he was very hesitant to talk on the subject at the dinner table and finally shut up by saying that discussion of religious matters was a waste of time.

LAVISH HOSPITALITY

It was in Alma-Ata that their hospitality exceeded all bounds. In the menus, besides caviare and white fish in jelly, there were several dishes closely allied to our dishes such as "pulao", "koftas", "kababs", "samosas", curried green peppers, etc. All sorts of alcoholic drinks were provided for the drinkers and varieties of cigarettes and cigars for the smokers. The main banquet was attended, beside others, by about 40 doctors from various parts of Kazakistan and it lasted till the small hours of the morning. A more enjoyable evening could not be desired and it was wound up with gifts given to each member of the delegation as a memento of our visit. The leader of the delegation was given a Russian microscope and the others received Russian stethoscopes, etc. Towards the end of the banquet the traditional roasted sheep's head was brought in with great ceremony and its right ear was chopped off and presented to the leader of the delegation who was expected to eat it. Whether he did so or not I do not quite remember.

In every institution that we visited in this town we were greeted with most unusual warmth and cordiality, and although the difficulty of language was constantly present, the words Pakistan and Muslim could be heard very frequently.

In colleges women constitute about seventy per cent of the students and amongst doctors also about seventy per cent are women. Women form the bulk of workers in the milk factory that we visited and we found them doing quite arduous jobs. Many policemen on point duty were women. Obviously the Russians have toughened up their women-folk for quite tough jobs. Policemen were not quite as numerous as one finds in

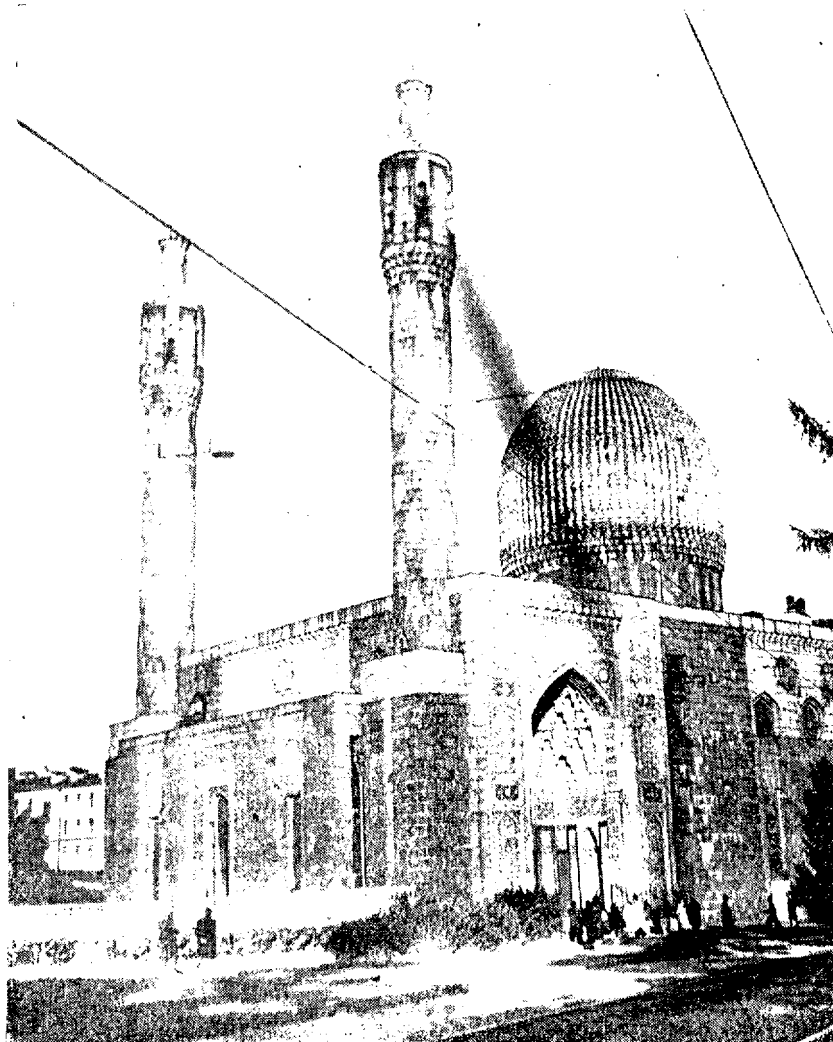
Moscow, but here too they were much more prominent than say Lahore.

One evening we were entertained to an opera show in the newly built opera house. Like the opera house at Tashkent this also is a magnificent building built in Kazak style with accommodation for over one thousand people. Another indication of the great affection Kazaks of Alma-Ata displayed towards us was that as we entered the opera house the whole house stood up and cheered us for a long time, which of course was very embarrassing for all of us, and they did not resume their seats until we had taken our seats in the front row.

The opera as usual was on some national theme of a patriotic nature with a great deal of Lenin and Stalin in it. As at Tashkent we were mobbed as we came out of the opera house, and it took us good half an hour before we could leave the place.

Alma-Ata is rising up into a modern city with electric trams and bus service. Long and wide avenues have been chalked out and the old shacks and mud houses are being replaced by modern buildings. The reconstruction of both

The Mosque in Leningrad.



Tashkent and Alma-Ata is no doubt marvellous and is being accomplished at a great speed.

DYING RELIGION

As regards religion, Islam in these places is not fully dead yet, but appears to be in its last throes. The minds of young persons are fully occupied with Lenin and Stalin through operas, plays, pictures and the parks for culture and rest, where they find much sport and amusement and, besides statues and pictures of Lenin and Stalin, see humiliating cartoons about Americans and their friends. While study of Marxism is compulsory, they are kept ignorant of Islam which is, thus, meeting its end slowly and imperceptibly.

In a brief visit such as ours it is very difficult to judge whether this change of way of spiritual life is really giving them satisfaction. Materially they are undoubtedly much better off now than in the Czarist times. Not knowing their language, and there being no opportunity of meeting them on intimate footing, it was impossible to gauge the true state of affairs. In our casual meetings there appeared to be much they wanted to convey but for some unknown reason they could not. There is no doubt much of the affection with which they met us at Alma-Ata and Tashkent was due to the ancient cultural links rather than just the curiosity to meet foreigners.

About sixty per cent of students and sixty per cent of persons in responsible jobs in Alma-Ata were Western Russians who had come to settle there permanently. It was also observed that the better dressed and better fed children and adults were as a rule Western Russians.

We were told that in Kazakistan before the Revolution there were only one hundred and ninety-six doctors and about one hundred small hospitals. Medical budget in those days was

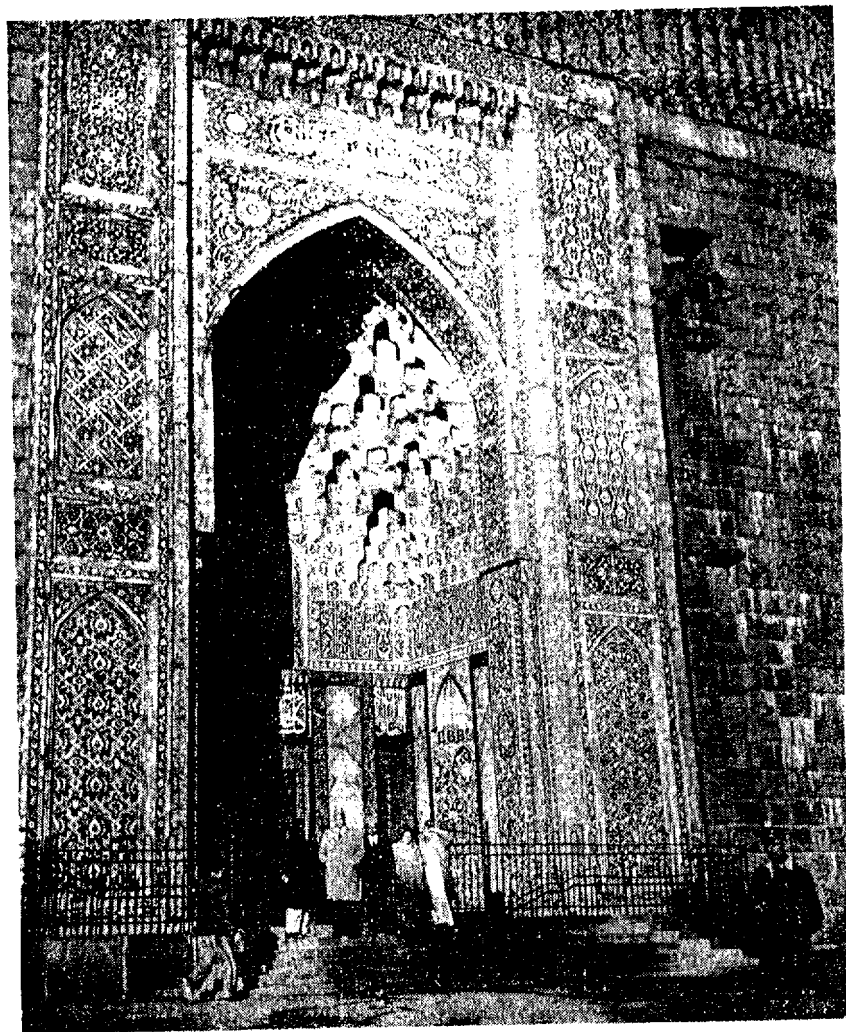
128,000 rubles. This year the budget was 713,000,000 rubles and there were about 6,000 doctors in Kazakhstan. There are two medical colleges admitting 850 students every year. A third medical college that is under planning is to be a post-graduate college. The Health Minister is a doctor and under him there are four vice-ministers. Kazakhstan is divided into sixteen regions and each region is again divided into ten to fifteen districts. In each district there is a health centre. We learnt that since five years feldshers had been replaced by fully qualified doctors in all important hospital jobs.

We were anxious to hear Radio Pakistan and for that purpose we tried to tune in the radio set of the guest house, but it was a strange coincidence that here as well as in Hotel Metropole in Moscow the knobs for adjustment of overseas short wave stations were missing, and only Moscow Radio could be tuned in. In both these places we were told that the knobs had fallen off and could not be traced.

THE JOURNEY TO LENINGRAD

After four pleasant and useful days in Alma-Ata we flew back to Moscow. The following evening we caught the train to Leningrad. Moscow Railway Station did not present the

Decorated gateway of the Mosque, Leningrad.



hustle and bustle of metropolitan railway stations. In fact it was almost deserted. We had our berths reserved in their crack night train from Moscow to Leningrad called the Red Star. It was not quite as luxurious as the American Pullman trains and there was no comparison with the more modern trains such as the streamlined California Zephyr Vista-Dome train, but it had an additional feature of having loudspeakers fitted in the corridors for listening to the Moscow Radio. It took us to Leningrad at an average speed of 25 miles an hour.

The countryside from Moscow to Leningrad is green and fertile. Villages on the way consist of poorly built houses mostly of timber, and the fields did not have the neatness of Czechoslovakian or Italian fields. Only a few cattle could be seen. Signs of bombardment during the last war in the shape of demolished factories and houses were still visible in many places. Hardly any train crossed us on the way and the roads did not have much traffic either. The reason was not far to seek. Every person who desires to go from one town to another in Russia has to give reasons for doing so and has to obtain a permit which is issued for a specified period.

Leningrad is decidedly a more impressive town than Moscow. Before the Revolution it was the capital city of Russia for a long time. It has several beautiful churches, wide avenues and impressive buildings and parks. Reconstruction of war-damaged buildings is going on and bullet marks can still be seen on the walls of many buildings.

We stayed at the modern looking Hotel Astoria and as usual enjoyed the privilege of a dining-room for our exclusive use. Night life in Leningrad as in Moscow is peculiarly dull. In large hotels there are spacious dining-rooms with orchestras and dance floors. Plenty of vodka and wine are consumed, dancing also goes on till late in the night but the crowd is never thick and lacks the hilarity and gusto which is generally a distinctive feature of such places. One hardly hears any human voice and only the orchestra



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In a laboratory of the Pavlov Institute near Leningrad.

or an occasional professional singer breaks the monotony of silence. Drab and informal dresses and lack of cosmetics do not help in making the places any more colourful.

The palace of the Czars on the bank of the river, at which a battleship fired the first shot which was a signal to start the Revolution, has been turned into a public museum. This palace is a veritable treasure house and one cannot help wondering at the versatile genius of the last Czar which ranged from the making of leather shoes for himself to the collection of rare pottery, paintings and pieces of art from all over the world.

LOCKED MOSQUE OF LENINGRAD

Two unusually attractive tall minarets on either side of a large colourful dome across the river attracted our attention. We

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learnt that it was a mosque built by an Amir of Bokhara. After several requests to our interpreters we were taken to the mosque which we found to be an impressive structure made of stone and coloured tiles. There was a large and imposing gateway which appeared to be leading into a big hall lit by large glass windows. The gate was locked. It seemed the mosque had not been opened for the past several years. In spite of the sturdy build of the mosque some portions were crumbling down and needed repairs. Next to the mosque was a small palace which probably once belonged to the Amir who had built this mosque.

After two days in Leningrad we drove to the railway station to catch the Red Star to take us back to Moscow. As there was still half an hour before the departure of the train, we utilized the time in walking up and down the platform. On one side of the platform was standing the Red Star with its luxurious coaches full of Russians. On the other side of the platform was standing a passenger train with wooden seats and

In the Park of Culture and Rest, Alma-Ata (Kazakistan) - author in the centre.





At the platform of the Moscow Railway Station in Leningrad.

coarse fittings also full of Russians. Class distinction is such a tough human ailment that even Russians have not been able to cure it.

The last two days in Moscow were spent in making frantic enquiries from the office of the Intourist Travel Agency of the USSR about our return journey to Karachi, but they were utterly ignorant of any airlines or travel arrangements outside Russia. They did not even possess the route maps or timetables of travel arrangements outside the USSR. A lot of running around had to be done to obtain visas from the Austrian, Italian and Czechoslovakian Embassies.

On the last evening a farewell reception was given at VOKS. Strangely enough there was no speech making at this farewell



Isaak Cathedral, Leningrad.

reception. Perhaps our press conference on the previous day had not been sufficiently flattering to them. It had not been reported in the morning papers although so much fuss had been made about it for several days before the actual day of the conference. On the 13th June, at 3.30 a.m. (Moscow time) we caught a plane for Prague.

GRATITUDE

I must take this opportunity of thanking once again our Russian hosts for the kindness and courtesy with which they treated us throughout the tour. Although we only occasionally met our hosts in person, yet their hospitality was lavish and everyone of us enjoyed every minute of our stay on the Russian soil. The trip was a great experience. We learnt much and we unlearnt much.

My only regret is that I could not indulge in my hobby of movie-making in the USSR. Upon my request the Pakistan Government had permitted me to take four dozen Kodachrome films with me, but the Russian authorities prohibited the entry of any films into their country. At the same time they pointed out that there would be no difficulty in obtaining 16mm. cine films there if I would take my cameras with me. I was disappointed to find that no 16mm. cine films were available there.

